United Nations A/54/334

General Assembly

Distr.: General
9 September 1999

Original: English

Fifty-fourth session
Items 119 and 128 of the provisional agenda*
Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Review of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Note by the Secretary-General

1. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/218 B of 29 July 1994, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith, for the attention of the Assembly, the report conveyed to him by the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services on the review of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

2. The Secretary-General takes note of the findings and concurs with the recommendations set out in the report.

* A/54/150

99-26120 (E) 151099

Review of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Summary

Following the approval by the General Assembly, in January 1998, of the proposals of the Secretary-General in his programme for reform, the former Department of Humanitarian Affairs was reorganized and renamed the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The findings and recommendations in the present report are based on a review of the management strategies of the Office aimed at achieving a strengthened capacity to respond to humanitarian crises, and on an assessment of the action taken to focus on core functions in order to achieve effectiveness in providing humanitarian assistance to countries in crisis, following the reorganization and restructuring of the Office.

The inspection by the Office of Internal Oversight Services concluded that the streamlining and reorganization within the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have enhanced its capabilities to respond to emerging humanitarian crises. The Office has strengthened its coordination with other departments of the United Nations Secretariat, and with United Nations funds and programmes, other humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, the Office has established meaningful and open dialogue with donors and with the humanitarian community. Equally important, the Office is displaying greater sensitivity to the specific mandates of other humanitarian agencies, and is taking measures to reduce the incidence of duplication of responsibilities, competition and disagreement over areas of operation that has beset the humanitarian community in the past.

The inspection also confirmed that the workings of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the consolidated appeals process have greatly improved.

Additional efforts are required, however, to enforce a more action-oriented approach in addressing issues of coordination within the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, and there is need for a strategic management framework to further enhance the appeals process. On the basis of the findings, the report makes five recommendations which include enhancing the functioning of the Executive Committee, establishing more effective monitoring of the consolidated appeals process, and strengthening the advocacy role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs with the general public.

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–5	4
II.	Policy development and advocacy	6–13	5
	A. Assistance to internally displaced persons	9–10	5
	B. Coping with the humanitarian impact of sanctions	11–12	5
	C. Linking relief to development	13	6
III.	Information management	14–15	6
IV.	Coordination mechanisms	16–31	6
	A. Inter-Agency Standing Committee	17–19	6
	B. Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs	20–24	7
	C. Field coordination	25	8
	D. Consolidated appeals process	26–30	8
	E. Relationships between humanitarian coordinators and special representatives of the Secretary-General	31	10
V.	Coordination of humanitarian emergency response	32–39	10
VI.	Conclusions	40–43	11
VII.	Recommendations	44–48	12
Annex.	Organigramme of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1998-1999		13

I. Introduction**

1. The programme for reform of the Secretary-General included his plans to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to respond to humanitarian crises. Those plans were endorsed by the General Assembly in section F of its resolution 52/12 B of 19 December 1997. A number of actions required of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs were set out in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950 and Add.1-7), as follows:

(a) The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs would focus on the core functions spelled out in General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 (the resolution that *led to the establishment of* the Department for Humanitarian Affairs), namely: (i) policy development and coordination functions in support of the Secretary-General, ensuring that all humanitarian issues, including those which fall between gaps in existing mandates of agencies such as protection and assistance for internally displaced persons, are addressed; (ii) advocacy of humanitarian issues with political organs, notably the Security Council; and (iii) coordination of humanitarian emergency response by ensuring that an appropriate response mechanism is established, through consultations in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, on the ground;

(b) The Inter-Agency Standing Committee would be further strengthened and continue to be the main consultative body for humanitarian agencies (see A/51/950, paras. 186-192).

2. An inspection of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services from late December 1998 through March 1999. The inspection focused on management strategies aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Office to respond to humanitarian crises. Actions taken to focus on core functions and thereby enhance their effectiveness were assessed. The functioning and effectiveness of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and, in particular, how it had been actually strengthened, were reviewed. The in-depth evaluation of the former Department of Humanitarian Affairs, carried out by the Office of Internal Oversight Services in late 1996 and early 1997, the aspects of the programme of reform of the Secretary-General related to humanitarian affairs, and the revision of the medium-term plan for the then Department, served as background information. Interviews were held with officials of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and several major donor representatives, the funds and programmes most directly involved in humanitarian assistance, i.e., the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) and members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs. The Office of Internal Oversight Services deeply appreciates the assistance rendered by all officials of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the funds and programmes concerned.

3. Following the approval by the General Assembly of the proposals of the Secretary-General, *in January 1998* the former Department of Humanitarian Affairs was *reorganized and* renamed the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was* given the mandate to: (a) coordinate international response to humanitarian crises, including contingency planning when appropriate; (b) provide the humanitarian community with support in policy development; and (c) act as an advocate on humanitarian issues.

4. The head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has dual responsibility as the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and as the Emergency Relief Coordinator. He is the principal adviser to the Secretary-General on humanitarian issues and also serves as a link between the humanitarian community and the intergovernmental organs of the United Nations, as well as the political, security, developmental and human rights elements of the United Nations system. This is achieved partly through his role as the convener of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, and through his chairmanship of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee brings together all major humanitarian actors, both within and outside the United Nations system. It works to develop a shared analysis of a given crisis and to ensure inter-agency decision-making on the response to complex emergencies and on the development of humanitarian policies.

5. The process of reform of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs sought to strengthen its leadership role in coordinating humanitarian efforts, using a more strategic, focused, proactive and consultative approach. Improved complementarity and interaction between the offices at Headquarters and Geneva, with more

** The text shown in italics represents the comments of management on the present report.

clarity of functions and objectives, was another important goal. The new organizational structure includes, *at Headquarters, a* Policy, Advocacy and Information Division, the Emergency Liaison Branch, *the Executive Office and the secretariat of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs*. The office at Geneva serves as the main focal point for the coordination of the response to natural disasters and environmental emergencies, contingency planning and day-to-day support of the field in complex emergencies, and for the preparation of consolidated inter-agency appeals. In the field, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is present at 23 locations where both international and national staff are deployed to carry out humanitarian activities.

II. Policy development and advocacy

6. With its partners in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is advancing humanitarian policy development by identifying humanitarian issues that arise from operational experience in the field and that require study and analysis, and by formulating policy guidelines.

7. A main focus of the advocacy function of the Office is to stimulate greater respect for, and compliance with, humanitarian principles, and to formulate policy responses when these principles are disregarded. The Office of Internal Oversight Services noted that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is working, through the mechanism of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, to find ways in which to give concrete effect to the principles for United Nations action in countries in crisis, and to develop country-specific ground rules covering issues such as access, security, and interaction with local and national authorities.

8. The efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs are aimed at giving voice to the victims and at ensuring that humanitarian issues and concerns are taken fully into account in all relevant political, peacekeeping, developmental, human rights and humanitarian forums. These efforts, in conjunction with those of other humanitarian organizations, are aimed not only at Member States of the United Nations and United Nations organs, such as the Security Council, *the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council*, but also aimed at the media and civil society, including non-governmental organizations and academia. The Office of Internal Oversight Services considers that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should further strengthen its advocacy role with the general public with regard to, for example, the security of humanitarian personnel.

A. Assistance to internally displaced persons

9. The Office of Internal Oversight Services ascertained that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is playing a key role in facilitating the establishment of a coordinated strategy to address issues affecting internally displaced persons and to define a framework for collaboration and division of labour in order to reinforce the mandates of humanitarian agencies and to avoid duplication of effort. The Emergency Relief Coordinator, in his capacity as the Chairman of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, is the system-wide focal point for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance to and protection of internally displaced persons, for which no single agency has a comprehensive mandate.

10. The issuance, by the representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, of the guiding principles on internal displacement (E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, annex) was an important step forward that has enhanced awareness among the international community of the worldwide dimension of internally displaced persons. These principles, which were presented to the Commission on Human Rights in 1998 and are fully supported by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, are based upon existing international humanitarian law and human rights instruments and will serve as an international standard to guide Governments as well as international humanitarian and development agencies in the provision of assistance and protection to internally displaced persons.

B. Coping with the humanitarian impact of sanctions

11. The increased use of sanctions regimes in recent years by the Security Council has brought to light a number of difficulties relating to the elaboration of such regimes and their enforcement. The lack of proper institutional arrangements to address, in an objective manner, the humanitarian impact of sanctions has limited the capacity of the United Nations system to respond efficiently to the humanitarian consequences of sanctions regimes. In his annual report on the work of the Organization in 1998, the Secretary-General stressed the need for a mechanism that renders sanctions a less blunt and more effective instrument,

aimed at exerting pressure on targeted regimes rather than peoples and thus reducing humanitarian costs.[1]

12. The Office of Internal Oversight Services found that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had taken the necessary steps to review the need for new institutional arrangements in the elaboration and implementation of sanctions regimes with regard to the efforts of the United Nations to minimize the humanitarian impact of sanctions. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has asserted its role as an intermediary between humanitarian organizations and sanctions authorities, and made appropriate institutional arrangements to process information on the potential or actual humanitarian impact of sanctions.

C. Linking relief to development

13. Humanitarian action is closely related to the political, human rights, socio-economic and environmental aspects of crises. A major challenge, therefore, is to develop more integrated responses throughout the United Nations system to complex crises and to peace-building. The Office of Internal Oversight Services learned that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is working with its inter-agency partners to develop and promote the concepts of strategic frameworks and common programming. The strategic frameworks define the principles, general policies and institutional arrangements for the response by the United Nations system to a humanitarian crisis and serves as a common conceptual tool to identify, analyse and prioritize key issues and objectives. It comprises a political strategy, field-based arrangements for a common international assistance programme, and human rights concerns. The policy concerns of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in this area are focused on: (a) the links between relief and development; (b) the development of appropriate assistance strategies during the transitional recovery phase; (c) the protection and security of civilian populations and of humanitarian workers; (d) ensuring that gender concerns are addressed in humanitarian response; (e) considering the criteria required to designate areas as safe or protected; and (f) studying the humanitarian implications of the proliferation of small arms.

III. Information management

14. The Information Management Services Branch of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs supports the policy and advocacy functions of the Office and consolidates information functions that were formerly dispersed among its various entities. The core functions of the Branch are to enhance the early warning capability of the Office and the humanitarian community, manage the publications programme of the Office in both print and electronic media, and manage the information resource centre of the Office.

15. The Branch addresses the problem of separate organizational Web sites on humanitarian issues by promoting the establishment of a single humanitarian gateway on the Web. Each organization would still maintain its own Web site but they would be linked and users would benefit from cross-organizational information. Since its official launch in 1996, ReliefWeb became one of the principal on-line information resources for the humanitarian community on global natural disasters and *complex* emergencies. ReliefWeb has users in over 150 countries who access more than 300,000 documents each month. Complex emergencies and natural disasters are monitored daily.

IV. Coordination mechanisms

16. Given the magnitude of complex humanitarian emergencies, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has increased its coordination efforts to ensure that the many civilian victims of conflicts and natural disasters are provided with timely humanitarian assistance and, if necessary, protection. As a result of these efforts, the international community provided over US$ 1 billion in aid (including bilateral aid) to victims of the approximate 61 natural and environmental disasters that occurred in 1998.

A. Inter-Agency Standing Committee

17. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee comprises representatives of relevant United Nations operational agencies and other intergovernmental and non-governmental humanitarian organizations. Participation by the World Bank since March 1999 has further strengthened the Standing Committee. Since the establishment of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in January 1998, various measures have contributed to strengthening the role of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as a viable mechanism for interaction within the wider humanitarian community and for ensuring dialogue with stakeholders. Senior representatives of the members of the Standing

Committee meet once a week in New York and at Geneva to exchange information on humanitarian issues affecting ongoing operations throughout the world. In addition to formal *working* meetings *on specific country issues*, the members of the Standing Committee engage in ongoing consultation at various levels, that is, *between the Emergency Relief Coordinator and* heads of agencies, as well as among Headquarters and field staff.

18. The Office of Internal Oversight Services learned that the Emergency Relief Coordinator has sought to engage the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in proactive and collaborative efforts to deal with a limited number of key humanitarian issues. In October 1998, the Standing Committee issued its recommendations related to the review of the capacity of the United Nations system for humanitarian assistance. The recommendations are being used to guide the selection of appropriate coordination arrangements at the field level. They further address issues related to internally displaced persons, local capacities for relief and development, resource mobilization, monitoring and evaluation, and human resources management and development. *The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has also issued major statements on support for the International Criminal Court, on days of tranquillity for polio eradication in a number of countries in an emergency situation and on the mainstreaming of gender concerns into humanitarian assistance and policies.* The Office for the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs is routinely taking the lead in fielding missions and negotiating access and other concessions on behalf of the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. *In exercising his advocacy role, the Emergency Relief Coordinator has routinely made important statements on behalf of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on major humanitarian issues, including the provision of access to and respect for the basic human rights of victims of conflict.*

19. Through its working group, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee has broadened the consultative process on policy issues by delegating to individual members lead responsibility in subsidiary working groups or reference groups for specific issues (e.g., gender and humanitarian response, human rights and humanitarian action, field practices with regard to internally displaced persons, and post-conflict reintegration).

B. Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs

20. As stated above, the head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is the convener of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, one of the four executive committees established as part of the United Nations reform, to strengthen policy and managerial coherence in the work of the Organization. The members of the Executive Committee *are the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, UNDP, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights. The Secretary-General has on an exceptional basis, approved the participation of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) and in meetings of the Executive Committee on an ad hoc basis.* The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is also a member of the Executive Committee on Peace and Security, which is convened by the head of the Department of Political Affairs. These committees enable simultaneous consideration of the political, security and humanitarian dimensions of emergency situations.

21. The creation of the executive committees, including the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, provided the United Nations with a mechanism to address gaps as well as overlaps in the concerted functioning of its various entities. The agendas for the monthly meetings of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs usually include points considered relevant by the concerned actors. While the briefings and the sharing of information are valuable, the Office of Internal Oversight Services would advise the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to adopt a more action-oriented approach by defining, more specifically, the issues to be addressed *within the United Nations context* under the various agenda items, and by focusing discussions on different options for action, without compromising the position of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

22. The Office of Internal Oversight Services gathered from interviews with members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee that, since January 1998, the meetings of the Committee and its *working groups* had become more substantive. A review by the Office of Internal Oversight Services of relevant documentation confirmed that specific issues are being addressed and decisions taken, and that the establishment in New York of a joint secretariat for the Standing Committee and the Executive Committee, which reports directly to the Emergency Relief Coordinator, had assisted in that process. Furthermore, the Office of Internal Oversight Services observed that the merging of the secretariats for the two committees into one entity had also alleviated some concerns regarding overlap in mandates and

duplication between the Standing Committee and the Executive Committee.

23. As called for by the Secretary-General in his proposals for reform, a humanitarian segment of the annual substantive session of the Economic and Social Council was held in 1998 to provide guidance on overall humanitarian issues and coordination. During the segment, Member States, members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and United Nations resident/humanitarian coordinators from selected countries engaged in high-level discussions on a number of topics relevant to the work of the humanitarian organizations. The establishment of the humanitarian affairs segment has afforded the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs an additional opportunity to bring to the attention of the Member States important issues in regard to addressing principles of humanitarian action. By means of its agreed conclusions, the Council has made a series of recommendations which were welcomed by the General Assembly. Among those recommendations was a request for the Secretary-General, in consultation with Governments, to recommend ways in which to enhance the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council (agreed conclusions 1998/1).[2] The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is following up on the implementation of the recommendations of the Council and, with regard to the humanitarian segment, submitted suggestions in April 1999 on ways in which to strengthen the capacity of the Council to review activities in the field, in particular in regard to coordination by United Nations agencies. Some concern was expressed about the need to ensure that the information submitted to the Council for its discussions does not duplicate that submitted to other bodies in the United Nations system which address humanitarian affairs. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs pointed out that the executive boards of operational agencies review the sectoral activities of those organizations only, whereas, during the humanitarian affairs segment, the Economic and Social Council reviews the performance of the United Nations humanitarian system as a whole, and in particular the performance of the Office in carrying out its coordination role.

24. The enhanced role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in briefing the Security Council has been found to be extremely useful and relevant.

C. Field coordination

25. The humanitarian response of the United Nations to most emergencies requires significant participation by a large number of actors in the field. To respond to emergency situations, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, in consultation with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, may appoint a humanitarian coordinator (usually the United Nations resident coordinator concerned) to ensure effective coordination of the overall humanitarian effort in the field. It is essential that humanitarian coordinators work closely with the representatives of other organizations of the United Nations system, as well as with those of non-governmental organizations and international organizations, to ensure the coherent and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance. Other responsibilities of the humanitarian coordinator include undertaking negotiations, on behalf of the humanitarian agencies, with relevant authorities on such issues as access to the needy populations, as well as the security of victims and relief workers. While the Inter-Agency Standing Committee considers that resident coordinators will usually serve as humanitarian coordinators, there are two other alternatives to the coordination arrangements, namely, a lead agency may be assigned to provide humanitarian coordination or an independent humanitarian coordinator may be appointed. The *Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has strengthened its Geneva office so that it can provide dedicated support and capacity to the humanitarian assistance coordination units in the field, thereby enabling them to respond more effectively to humanitarian needs.*

D. Consolidated appeals process

26. The success of the international community in responding to a humanitarian crisis depends not only on well-coordinated action, but also on raising the resources needed to ensure timely assistance. The consolidated appeals process is designed to provide an overall strategy that enables the United Nations system to set clear goals and to define priorities for the humanitarian programme in a given country. The consolidated appeals process provides a framework for joint programming, establishment of common priorities and joint resource mobilization. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs takes the lead in preparing the appeals, following up with donor countries and monitoring the receipt and use of contributions.

27. The Office of Internal Oversight Services learned that, between 1992 and 1998, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had launched 94 consolidated appeals which had raised US$ 12.5 billion for humanitarian assistance in 17 countries. In 1998, United Nations agencies and programmes requested a total of US$ 2.16 billion

through the consolidated appeals process to address humanitarian needs in more than 15 countries that were experiencing a complex emergency. By the end of 1998, the cumulative response to those appeals had been a little under 50 per cent. This reduced donor response rate appears to be following a downward trend in funding humanitarian operations that has been witnessed over the past few years. The Office of Internal Oversight Services was informed that, in an effort to counter this trend, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its partners in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee have taken the necessary steps to strengthen the consolidated appeals process. The Office for Internal Oversight Services noted that the simultaneous issuance in December 1998 of consolidated appeals for 1999, assisted in establishing more transparency in relationships with 20 major or potential donors, which would hopefully increase funding through the consolidated appeals process.

28. During 1998, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its partners in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee worked on the planning and preparation of appeal documents following a comprehensive technical guide developed at the conclusion of an inter-agency process workshop held earlier in the year. In 1999, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has placed additional emphasis on the appeal preparation process to ensure that it is more comprehensive and field driven. As far as possible, common humanitarian action plans have been developed in collaboration with all members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Governments, non-governmental organizations and donors in order to ensure the widest support for the programme and projects for which funding is being sought. Emphasis is placed on keeping budgets realistic and fundable, while incorporating both humanitarian emergencies and post-conflict rehabilitation needs, in keeping with the recommendations of the Economic and Social Council and the Secretary-General. In addition, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has organized training workshops for sensitizing and orienting staff to the new thinking and approaches in improving the system. The Office continues to build a cadre of expertise, drawn from cooperating agencies of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and its own international resources, in order to improve the processes and end product in this domain. This is being done in close cooperation with governmental partners in order to ensure that their own programming and monitoring expertise are durably enhanced. The Office of Internal Oversight Services welcomes these initiatives.

29. The Office of Internal Oversight Services is of the view that the 1998 consolidated appeals process has seen an improvement over previous appeals in terms of organization; this was confirmed by the donor countries interviewed. The Office of Internal Oversight Services, however, considers that there is need for a more effective monitoring process and for more consistent provision of follow-up information to donors, after the appeals are issued. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has recognized this need, and scheduled a mid-term review of the consolidated appeals process, to be presented to donors on 22 July 1999. The Office of Internal Oversight Services also found that transparency with regard to various trust funds is required and recommends that a system of reporting to donors on the status of those funds be established. Some donors suggested that the availability of resources to a country or region be indicated and that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should play a bigger role in distributing funds according to established priorities. On the other hand, in response to queries by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, those donors acknowledged that they could be more forthcoming in signalling priorities and providing feedback. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recognized that some donors had indeed expressed the wish for it to play a larger role in the distribution of funds through the consolidated appeals process but maintained that the Office did not have the capacity, in its present form, to deal with it. The Office of Internal Oversight Services is of the view that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs needs to look more closely into this and to communicate its position to the concerned donors.

30. The linkage between the programming aspects of the consolidated appeals process and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) provides the basis for strategically coordinated programming for recovery and peace-building. The consolidated appeals process itself is linked to the strategic framework process. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are currently engaged in efforts to strengthen the effectiveness of both UNDAF and the consolidated appeals process. Because UNDAF is a tool for coordinating development programmes in close collaboration with Governments, there is a need to reconcile the two approaches in the recovery process. The Office of Internal Oversight Services considers this linkage an essential element of the ongoing need for United Nations offices to pool resources and work closely together. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as facilitator of the consolidated appeals process, should continue working with the United Nations Development

Group, as the lead for UNDAF, on the modalities required for the consistent and regular exchange of information on the developments in both processes.

E. Relationships between humanitarian coordinators and special representatives of the Secretary-General

31. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has developed policy guidelines to assist all humanitarian coordinators in their working relationships with political appointees of the Secretary-General. These guidelines conform to the principles and recommendations laid out in the reports of the Secretary-General on renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform (A/51/950 and Add.1-7) and on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871-S/1998/318). The guidelines also complement the standard directives for special representatives of the Secretary-General heading multidimensional peacekeeping operations, which were recommended by the Executive Committee on Peace and Security and approved by the Secretary-General.

V. Coordination of humanitarian emergency response

32. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has developed a set of policy initiatives which are intended to respond to complex emergencies; these include: (a) monitoring and early warning; (b) contingency planning; (c) inter-agency situation/needs assessment; (d) field coordination mechanisms; and (e) consolidated appeals.

33. In the area of early warning, the Office is continuously monitoring humanitarian developments throughout the world, especially in potentially vulnerable countries and regions, in order to identify crises that have humanitarian implications.

34. The Office has developed, in consultation with its partners, a contingency plan to move very quickly to determine humanitarian needs and to put in place appropriate coordination mechanisms as a humanitarian crisis emerges. The plan involves carrying out a prompt and objective assessment of the rapidly changing situation to enable immediate intervention in such a crisis, while taking joint decisions on the course of action for each scenario.

35. Some United Nations agencies expressed to the Office of Internal Oversight Services their concern with the seemingly heavy reliance of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on UNDP which does not have the capability to respond to emergencies. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs responded that its

> *"... relations with UNDP are governed primarily by the fact that the two bodies share responsibility for field coordination. Since in most cases the functions of humanitarian coordinator and resident representative are combined, it is essential for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to maintain close links with UNDP and the United Nations Development Group in order to ensure effective coordination. Similarly, in order to ensure a smooth transition from relief to development, in both conflict-related emergencies and natural disasters, it is essential that UNDP and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs remain in close contact regarding the action to be taken in specific country situations. These relations do not affect the division of labour as concerns emergency response. Furthermore, as a result of the United Nations reform package of July 1997, disaster mitigation was divested from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to UNDP. This has called for even closer cooperation between the two bodies, since disaster response and disaster prevention remain within the purview of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs."*

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was of the opinion that the observation was a matter of perception which it would address at the principals' level. The Office of Internal Oversight Services has taken due note of these comments. It would, however, urge the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to allay this misgiving and address the concern of the agencies by helping them to understand the nature of the relationship between the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNDP, and by ensuring that there are no substantive grounds for that concern.

36. The reform of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs led to the strengthening of emergency response functions within the Complex Emergency Response Branch at Geneva and the Emergency Liaison Branch in New York. The Complex Emergency Response Branch is the principal focal point for day-to-day contact with the field. In broad terms, the Branch is responsible and accountable for all issues of field support to promote coordination, the preparation of appeals and other documents to the donor community. The

Emergency Liaison Branch supports the Emergency Relief Coordinator and field coordinators on cross-country policy issues with humanitarian, political, security and military dimensions; interacts with Secretariat entities (in particular the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator), intergovernmental bodies and relevant actors on complex emergency situations and issues; and prepares reports on the humanitarian aspects of emergencies for the Secretary-General, the Security Council, other intergovernmental bodies and relevant forums.

37. The humanitarian consequences of natural and environmental catastrophes and industrial accidents often exceed the coping mechanisms and aid resources of a single country. When natural disasters strike, their impact is particularly severe in developing countries and international interventions are often needed to help the victims. Responding to emergencies and natural disasters requires the rapid deployment of human, financial and logistical resources. To help coordinate the actions of the international community in responding to disasters, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has *further developed the* disaster response system, *established by the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator and the former Department of Humanitarian Affairs,* which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week and provides round-the-clock readiness for disasters. It monitors field situations in order to identify natural disasters, environmental emergencies and industrial accidents, in close collaboration with the United Nations resident coordinators. *The Disaster Response Branch of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs keeps a stock of emergency relief supplies in the warehouse at Pisa, Italy, and organizes shipments of relief items to disaster-affected areas.*

38. *The disaster response system comprises four main activities: issuance of situation reports, including appeals for international assistance and information on international response; dispatch of United Nations disaster assessment and coordination teams to the disaster-affected country; facilitation of the use of military and civil defence assets in humanitarian assistance; and provision of emergency grants and channelling of cash contributions by donors for relief assistance.*

39. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance has also established the Central Emergency Revolving Fund under the authority of the Emergency Relief Coordinator to allow for an immediate response to an emergency. The Fund may be used at the very outset of an emergency and, in exceptional cases, during the latter phases to help humanitarian agencies with cash-flow problems before donor contributions become available. Regulations require that agencies borrowing from the Fund reimburse the amount loaned within a specific period, which is not to exceed one year. Since 1992, a total of US$ 127.7 million has been disbursed from the Fund, with 80 per cent of it disbursed to UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP.

VI. Conclusions

40. The inspection by the Office of Internal Oversight Services has confirmed that the streamlining and reorganization within the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have enhanced the capabilities of that Office to respond to emerging humanitarian crises. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has indeed strengthened its coordination and cooperation efforts with United Nations Secretariat departments and United Nations funds and programmes, other humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations, and established a meaningful and open dialogue with the humanitarian community and with donors. The meetings convened systematically by the Emergency Relief Coordinator played an important role in that respect. The Office of Internal Oversight Services noted that all persons interviewed considered that the appointment of the Emergency Relief Coordinator in January 1998 had greatly improved the effectiveness of the operations of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

41. The Office of Internal Oversight Services found that, following its reform, the priorities of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had become responsibly well-ordered, and procedures for the support of field coordination had been streamlined. Equally important, the problems of duplication of responsibilities, competition and disagreements over areas of operations that had beset the humanitarian community in the past, had been significantly reduced. Inter-agency tensions had abated, with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs stepping back and acknowledging its non-operational role, displaying sensitivity to the specific areas of operation of other agencies. The United Nations funds and programmes confirmed that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was actually facilitating coordination in the field. These are all crucial factors required for the success of humanitarian operations.

42. The inspection also confirmed that the working of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee has improved; specific issues are being addressed, and decisions taken. Through continuous informal consultations with members of the

Standing Committee, the Emergency Relief Coordinator is able to provide effective leadership in addressing evolving humanitarian problems. The merging of the secretariats for the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee within the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has alleviated concerns regarding overlap in mandates and duplication between those mechanisms. Nevertheless, additional efforts are required to enforce a more action-oriented approach in addressing issues in the Executive Committee.

43. Although the consolidated inter-agency appeal process has been strengthened, it is the view of the Office of Internal Oversight Services that there still is an obvious need for a strategic management framework to further enhance the process. Such a framework should involve shared political goals, a real sense of priority-setting among the participating agencies, and increased transparency with regard to the status of trust funds.

VII. Recommendations

44. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should strengthen its advocacy role with the general public, for example, with regard to the security of humanitarian personnel (SP-99-001-1)*** (see para. 8 above).

45. The Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should pursue the necessary action in respect of meeting the need for new institutional arrangements in the elaboration and implementation of sanctions regimes with regard to the efforts of the United Nations to minimize the humanitarian impact of sanctions (SP-99-001-2)*** (see para. 12 above).

46. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should enhance the functioning of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs in particular by complementing information sharing with more pronounced action-oriented decision-making, and by focusing its agenda (SP-99-001-3)*** (see para. 21 above).

47. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should take appropriate action to comply with the recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services regarding improvements to the consolidated appeals process (SP-99-001-4)*** (see paras. 29,30 and 43 above).

48. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should address the concern expressed about the perceived over-reliance on UNDP, and ensure that there are no substantive grounds for it (SP-99-001-5)*** (see para. 35 above).

(Signed) Karl Th. **Paschke**
Under-Secretary-General for
Internal Oversight Services

Notes

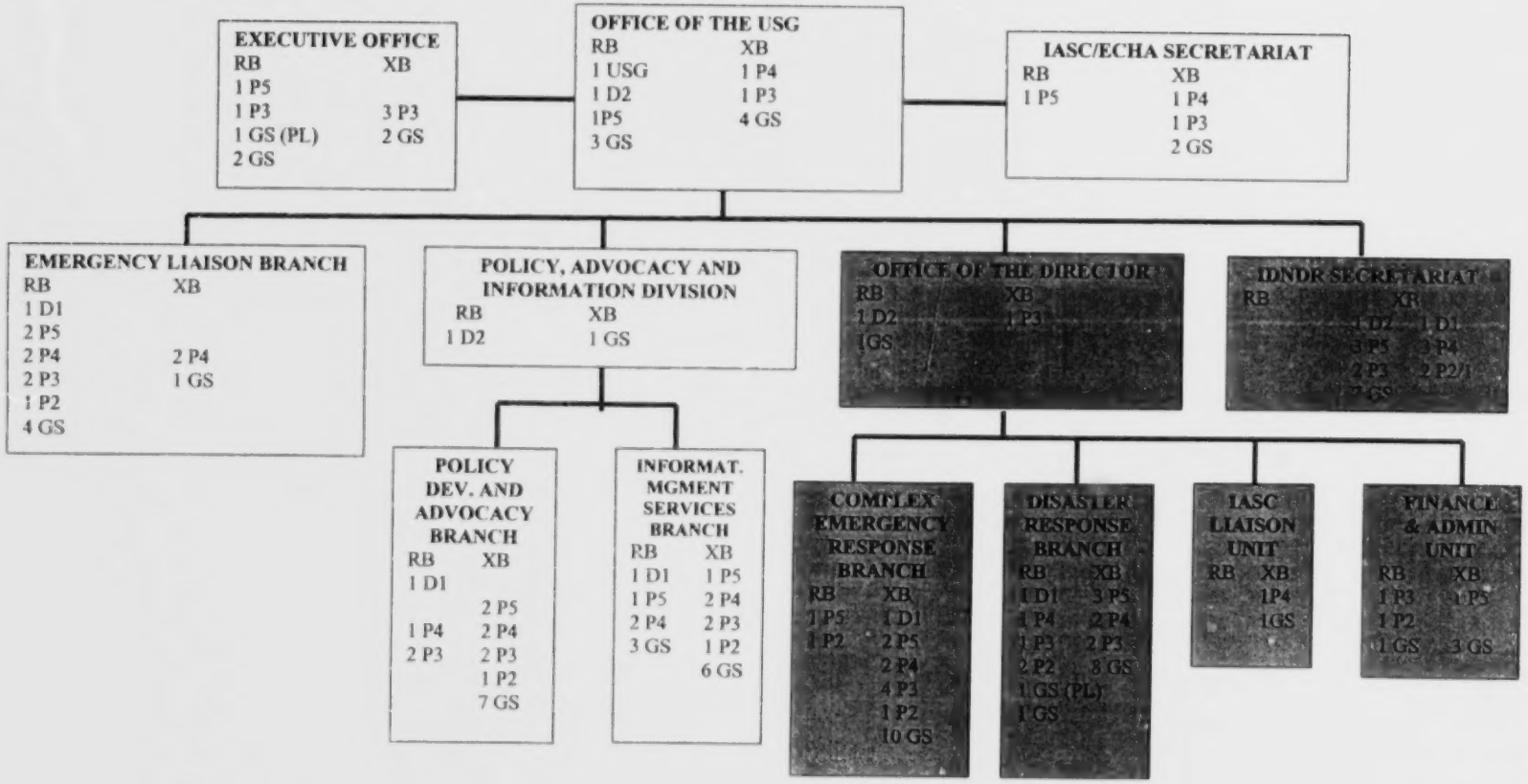
[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 1* (A/53/1), para. 62.

[2] See ibid., *Supplement No. 3 and corrigendum and addendum* (A/53/3 and Corr.1 and Add.1), chap. VII.

*** An internal code used by the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

Annex

Organigramme of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1998-1999*



* All posts are approved core posts for the Office. Grey blocks represent the Office at Geneva.

Abbreviations: ECHA (Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs), IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee), IDNDR (International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction), PL (Principal level), RB (regular budgetary resources), XB (extrabudgetary resources).